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ABSTRACT

This report documents the work of Amachi, a mentoring program for children of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated parents in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Volunteers are recruited from inner-city congregations to provide one-to-one mentoring to the children. Beyond being the source of mentors, the congregations are a key part of the initiative. Information for this report comes from interviews with program developers, Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Amachi staff, pastors, church volunteer coordinators, and mentors. This report describes challenges and successes of the Amachi model, focusing on the structure of the program in Philadelphia; describes the steps involved in transforming Amachi from plan to reality, highlighting the strategies for recruiting children, pastors, and volunteers; and examines the experiences of mentors and mentees and the challenges and successes of the matches thus far. A combination of four factors was essential (structure, management, commitment, and resources). One partner was an organization that had substantive experience with mentoring and could provide the necessary infrastructure. The partnership between secular and faith-based organizations was designed to be a "true partnership." There was leadership that was able to bridge the faith and secular communities. A firm system of accountability was key to success. (Contains 11 references and 23 endnotes.) (SM)

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MENTORING CHILDREN OF PRISONERS IN PHILADELPHIA

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A PUBLICATION OF PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES AND
THE CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON RELIGION AND URBAN CIVIL SOCIETY

Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs. P/PV designs, tests and studies initiatives that increase supports, skills and opportunities of residents of low-income communities; works with policymakers to see that the lessons and evidence produced are reflected in policy; and provides training, technical assistance and learning opportunities to practitioners based on documented effective practices.

The Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, part of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania, produces and disseminates empirical knowledge about the role of religion in contemporary urban America. Its work includes a focus on how national and local faith-based organizations help to solve big-city social problems.

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John J. DiIulio, Jr., former Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) Senior Advisor and board member, was the initial force behind Amachi; and Judy Vredenburg, Douglas Powell, Marlene Olshan, and Cheryl Thomas, all of Big Brothers Big Sisters, have provided strong leadership for the program. We also thank Tim Merrill, who was director of Amachi during its planning phase.

A number of people played key roles in the field during the formative stages of the project. They include Community Impact Directors, Gayle Washington, John Coger, Ruben Ortiz, and Larry Watson, Sr., and Mentor Support Coordinators, Yvonne Addison, Richard Warner, Corey Kirby, Robin Blake, Dennis Green, and Higuemota Asson.

We also want to thank many people at P/PV for their contributions to Amachi and to this report. Joseph P. Tierney, former head of P/PV's Greater Philadelphia Initiatives, and Terry Cooper provided early leadership for the project. W. Wilson Goode, Sr., Senior Advisor on Faith-Based Initiatives and director of Amachi, worked tirelessly to implement the program. Jodina Hicks provided invaluable support during the initial years of the project; and Wendy McClanahan, Shawn Bauldry, and Chrissy Labs expertly handled the data collection and analysis.

Others at P/PV also contributed their ideas and insights to the report. Jean Grossman provided guidance in interpreting the data, and Pat Meller provided help in understanding program costs. Former P/PV staffer Bill Hangley, Jr., conducted early interviews with pastors. Gary Walker and David Racine read previous versions of the report and offered valuable feedback.

A special thanks goes to Arlene F. Lee, director of the Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners at the Child Welfare League of America, for taking the time to discuss current research on children of incarcerated parents. Thanks, also, to Penelope Malish, of Malish & Pagonis, who designed the report, and to Maxine Sherman, who copyedited it.

Most important, we want to acknowledge the pastors and Church Volunteer Coordinators (CVCs) for their commitment and contributions to Amachi. Although space does not allow us to acknowledge them each by name, we want to thank Herbert Lusk for his early leadership and passion for the program. In addition, a number of pastors and CVCs contributed directly to this report by providing information about their experiences with Amachi and insights into the program. They include Robert J. Lovett, Joe Darrow, James Robinson, Steve Avinger, Sr., Joel Van Dyke, Gerardo Colon, Sam Slaffey, Clifford Cutter, Willie Graves, Carlton Rodgers, James Lovett, Larry Tucker, Sr., Chalon Tiedeken, Linda Dunston, Harry Robinson, and Phyllis Taylor. (See the Appendix for a list of churches partnering in Amachi.)

And, finally, we thank the 482 volunteers who have given more than 50,000 hours to mentoring children of prisoners.

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Foreword

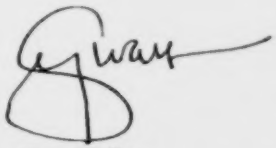
Occasionally, a new initiative comes along that seems unquestionably the right thing to do. The Amachi initiative, which mentors the children of prisoners, is one.

This report documents Amachi's early years of operation in Philadelphia, its birthplace. Because Amachi's success in Philadelphia has sparked interest in many cities around the country, as well as at the White House and in Congress, the report discusses not only data regarding program quality and effectiveness, but also the strategies and mechanics of setting up, operating, and maintaining an Amachi program. It is meant to be helpful to those interested in supporting or operating an Amachi program; it will also be enlightening to those who think that mentoring is a simple intervention.

John DiIulio, now Frederic Fox Leadership Professor of Politics, Religion and Civil Society at the University of Pennsylvania, had the idea for Amachi—and W. Wilson Goode, former Mayor of Philadelphia and currently Senior Advisor on Faith-Based Initiatives at P/PV, then carried it out. The Pew Charitable Trusts supported both the development and the implementation of Amachi. Though many others played vital supportive roles, their outstanding vision, commitment and leadership have made Amachi Philadelphia the successful initiative you will read about.

Amachi's future depends, of course, on many factors; but President Bush's State of the Union call for substantial federal financial support, and the commitment expressed by Big Brothers Big Sisters of America and many of its local affiliates to expand Amachi's reach in the United States, bode well. Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern Pennsylvania has also made a significant financial and mission commitment to continue and expand Amachi in the Philadelphia region.

In modern America, too many children lack the acceptance, care, and guidance of committed adults—certainly none more so than the children of prisoners.



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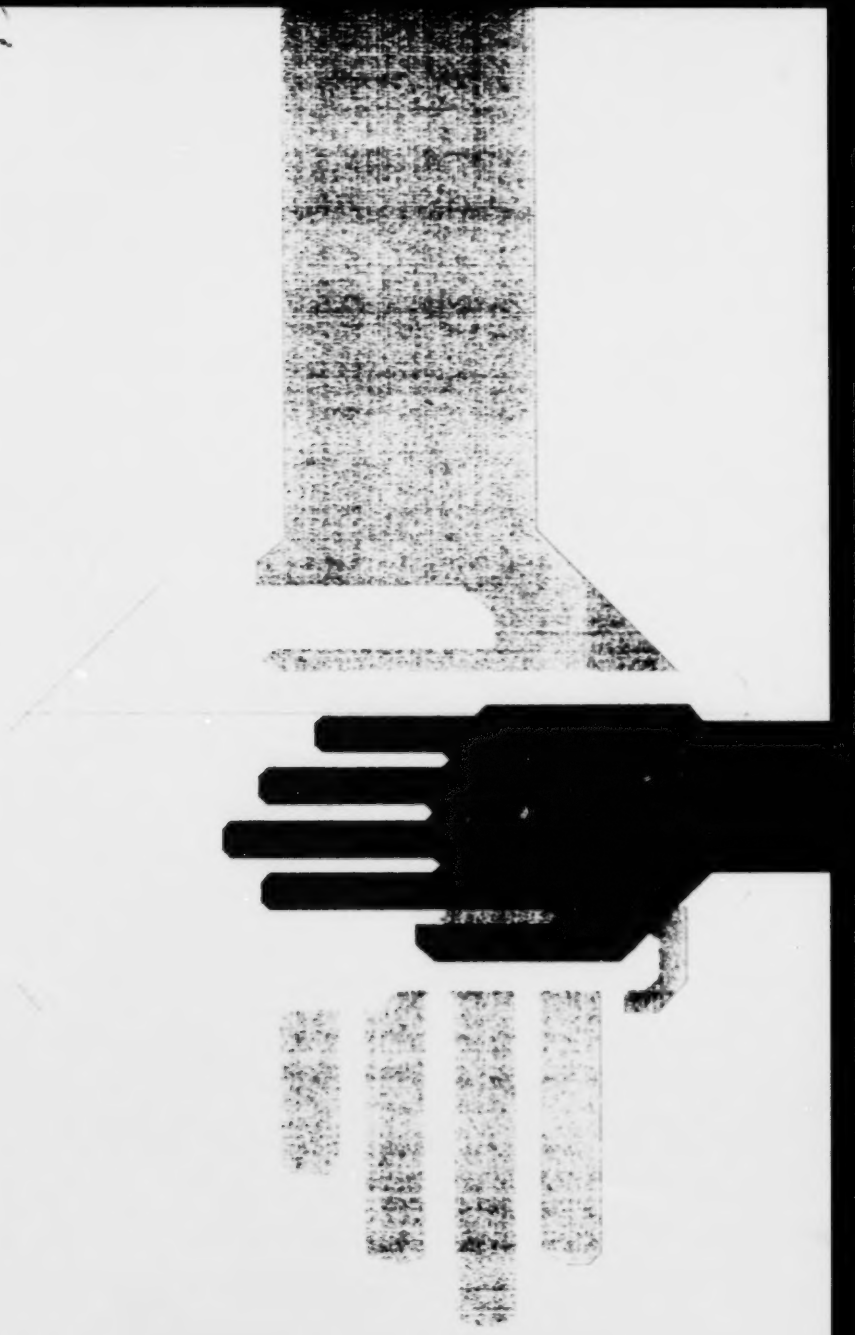

Introduction

Across the United States, an estimated two million children, ages 5 to 18, have a parent who is incarcerated in a federal or state prison or a local jail. The majority of these children are very young: over half are less than 10 years old, and more than 20 percent are younger than age 5.[1] Many of them share the challenges faced by the larger population of this country's at-risk young people: poverty, violence, limited opportunities for an adequate education, and a future that appears to hold very little promise.

But these children often face additional risks as well. In many cases, they have suffered the unique trauma of seeing their parent arrested and taken away. And with a parent's incarceration, their connection to a central adult in their lives has been cut off. While their parents are in prison, the children might live with a grandparent, aunt, their other parent, or in a foster home or other facility. Some are separated from their siblings. Some are shifted from one caregiving arrangement to another. These caregivers are likely to be living in poverty and to lack the personal resources necessary to meet the children's needs.

Those needs can be complex. While research on the specific challenges faced by children of incarcerated parents is still in its early stages, studies suggest that they suffer from a particular form of grief and loss that comes from having a parent who is alive but unreachable.[2] The children may experience a complex mix of anger, sadness, shame, guilt, and depression. As a result, they often act out inappropriately and have classroom behavior difficulties and low academic performance.[3] Not surprisingly, a high percentage end up in serious trouble themselves.

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In fact, according to a U.S. Senate Report, children of prisoners are six times more likely than other children to be incarcerated at some point in their lives. Without effective intervention strategies, as many as 70 percent of these children will become involved with the criminal justice system.[4]

The number of children at risk in these ways is certain to grow. The nation's prison population is increasing by almost six percent a year. Significantly, the number of women in prison is increasing at an even faster pace, more than doubling since 1990. Women, far more often than men, are a child's custodial parent before entering prison. Thus, increasing numbers of children are losing the central adult in their lives to crime and the prison system.[5]

Despite their numbers and the intensified risks they face, these children remain mostly invisible to policymakers and social service organizations and, even, within their own communities. The Child Welfare League of America cites several factors that have combined to hide them from view. Some factors are institutional: the criminal justice system has not traditionally been concerned with inmates' family relationships, and there is also a lack of communication between prisons and child welfare agencies. Other factors are a result of deeply ingrained personal feelings: children and their relatives feel shame about incarcerated parents and fear being stigmatized. Thus, they tend to remain silent and reluctant to ask for assistance.[6]

Why Mentoring?

Because these children have not, until recently, been recognized as a specific group with special needs, there is little knowledge about what interventions might measurably improve their prospects in life. But what is known is that, in many cases, they are attempting to grow up without a steady, reliable adult in their lives—and that a consistent, nurturing relationship with a dependable adult is an essential developmental support for children.

Given this reality, mentoring would seem to be a promising approach for responding to the challenges these children are facing. Evaluation results provide clear evidence that mentors can make a tangible difference in young people's lives. In the mid-1990s, Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs, conducted a random assignment study of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA), the nationally known mentoring organization. The results

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showed that having a mentor—a consistently caring and supportive adult—significantly reduced a young person's initiation of drug and alcohol use, improved their school performance and attendance, and reduced incidences of violence.[7]

Thus, several years ago, with generous funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts,[8] P/PV, led by Senior Advisor and board member John J. DiIulio, Jr., and Vice-President Joseph P. Tierney, began developing a mentoring program for children of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated parents in Philadelphia. The initiative was named "Amachi," a West African word that means "who knows but what God has brought us through this child." Volunteers would be recruited from inner-city congregations to provide one-to-one mentoring to the children. And beyond being a source of mentors, the congregations would be key partners in the initiative.

There were several reasons for turning to churches in this way. In the communities where these children live, the church is often the most important remaining institution, and many of those churches have been a strong support for the communities and a source of volunteers who are forces for positive change. Volunteers from local congregations have helped feed the hungry and provided shelter for the homeless. They have run day-care centers, built housing for senior citizens, and operated after-school programs. Thus, it was logical to believe that congregations which saw their missions as extending beyond the walls of their buildings and into their communities would respond to Amachi's vision of providing crucial support for children in their neighborhoods.

Amachi adopted the motto, "People of Faith Mentoring Children of Promise." And the project—now a partnership of P/PV, BBBSA, and the Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society (CRRUCS) at the University of Pennsylvania, an organization that conducts research on the role of religion in contemporary urban America—got up and running at a rapid pace. It began recruiting churches in November 2000; and by April 2001, the first mentors were meeting with their mentees. By the end of January 2002, Amachi was operating through 42 churches and had made almost 400 matches.

Although still a relatively new initiative, Amachi is already at a key point in its history. It has expanded to additional churches in Philadelphia and has begun a second program in the nearby city of Chester, Pennsylvania. With funding from The Pinkerton Foundation, an Amachi project is also underway in Brooklyn, New York, where Senator Hillary Clinton is chair of the Advisory Group.[9]

A growing number of additional cities have expressed interest in Amachi. There is also support at the federal level. In January 2002, when President Bush signed the bill extending and expanding the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program, it included authorization for a mentoring program for children of prisoners; and, in his 2003 State of the Union Address, he specifically proposed a $150 million initiative that would bring mentors to 100,000 of those children. In May, the federal Family and Youth Services Bureau announced the availability of funds and issued a request for applications for its Mentoring Children of Prisoners Program.

The Structure of This Report

As Amachi looks toward expansion, what lessons can policymakers, funders, and potential new sites learn from the experiences in Philadelphia? This report describes the challenges and successes of Amachi, to date, and discusses the implications of those experiences. The following chapter, Chapter II, outlines the components of the Amachi model and the particular structure of the program in Philadelphia. Chapter III describes the steps involved in transforming Amachi from plan to reality, focusing on the strategies for recruiting children, pastors, and volunteers. Chapter IV then examines the experiences of the mentors and their mentees, and the challenges and successes of the matches thus far. A concluding chapter outlines lessons learned from the Amachi experience.

Information for the report is drawn from interviews with program developers, BBBS and Amachi staff, pastors, church volunteer coordinators, and mentors, as well as from data collected by P/PV and BBBS.

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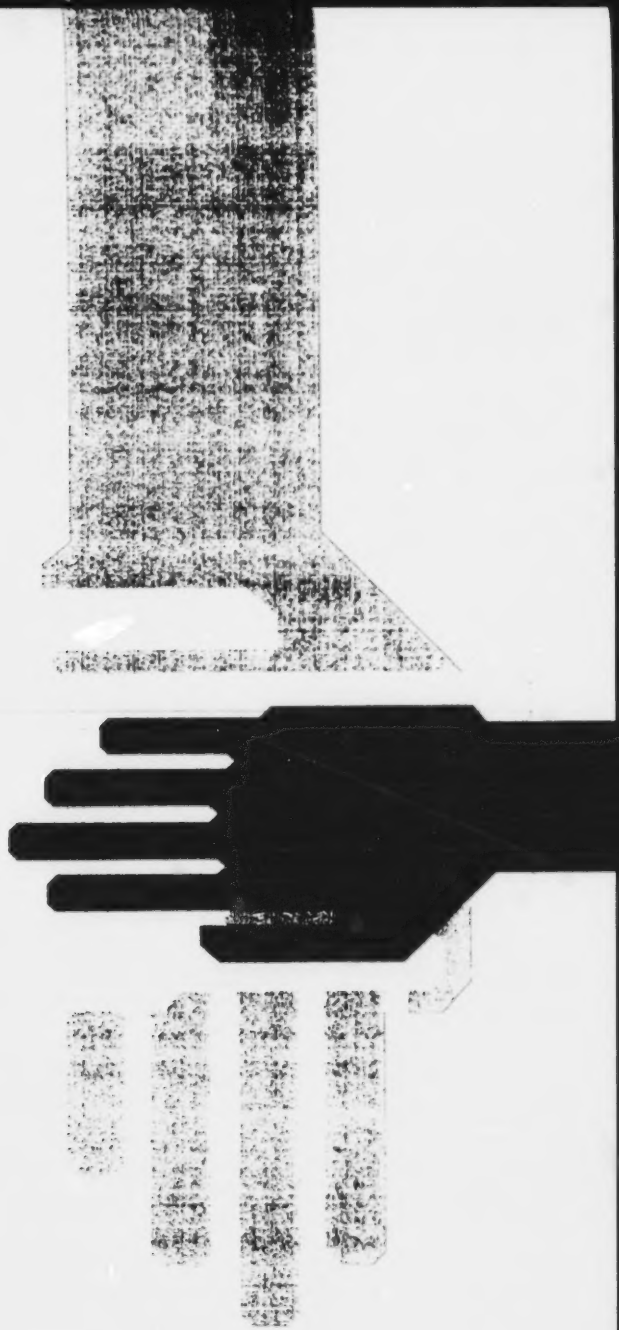

How Amachi Works

Amachi is a straightforward and highly focused program: through a partnership of secular and faith-based institutions, volunteers recruited from congregations mentor children of prisoners. The model was developed from research findings on the benefits of mentoring and the potential of inner-city congregations to address some of the significant challenges facing their communities—including findings about both practices that work and those that are less likely to be successful.

Research on mentoring has shown that positive outcomes occur only when matches meet regularly for at least a year and that solid program infrastructure is necessary for this to occur. Strong mentoring relationships do not happen automatically. Well-planned, well-run programs—programs that carefully screen, train, monitor, and support mentors so the matches are able to develop and endure—have positive effects. However, poorly implemented mentoring programs are less likely to produce such benefits.[10]

Similarly, while inner-city congregations are potentially vital sources of volunteers who can help bring about positive changes in their communities, their involvement will not happen automatically. Members of those congregations respond to the leadership of their pastors. If the leadership is passive concerning community involvement, the congregation will be passive as well. However, if the leadership is committed—if it sees the issue being addressed as meaningful and directly connected to the church's mission, and conveys that message to the congregation—members will respond.[11]

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The Model

Drawing on research on effective practices, the Amachi model was intended to engage congregations, take advantage of each partner's strengths, and lead to large numbers of successful mentoring relationships. The model included clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the partners; a staffing configuration that supported each partner and contributed to the goals of the overall partnership; and a data-collection system for monitoring the matches and ensuring accountability.

The Partners

The Amachi model required an organization to implement and oversee the project. In Philadelphia, P/PV took that role. It was responsible for administrative oversight and financial management, as well as for recruiting congregations and children. The organization also collected and analyzed the data used to monitor the matches and gauge the overall progress of Amachi, and worked with the key partners to address the inevitable problems that arise during start-up of a new project. Those partners were the congregations and Big Brothers Big Sisters.

The Congregations

Congregations are partners in Amachi, not just sources of volunteers. The presence of Amachi in a church reflects the pastor's and congregation's conviction that the project is very much a part of their mission in the world.

Each participating church committed to recruiting 10 volunteers from its congregation, who would meet at least one hour a week for a year with a child of a current or former prisoner. Each church was also responsible for collecting and submitting monthly data on how often those matches were meeting. Beyond that, however, congregations were expected to nurture and support the volunteers, and to step in if they were not meeting their commitment. To that end, each pastor named a Church Volunteer Coordinator (CVC), who was responsible for overseeing and coordinating Amachi within the congregation. Many of the CVCs had previously served as a volunteer youth director or in a similar role at the church. They generally checked with mentors on a weekly basis, either through regularly scheduled meetings, phone calls, or informal conversations after Sunday worship services.

To help cover the financial cost of partnering with Amachi, each congregation received an annual stipend of $1,500, as well as $5,000 to support the part-time CVC position.

Big Brothers Big Sisters

As the nation's oldest and most experienced mentoring organization, BBBS has well-established, effective procedures for screening, matching, training, and monitoring and supporting mentors. Its role in Amachi was to provide the expertise and infrastructure that are necessary if mentoring relationships are going to be able to grow and endure and, ultimately, lead to positive outcomes for the children.

BBBS case managers, called Mentor Support Coordinators (MSCs), were responsible for screening the volunteers, and providing supervision and support for all of the matches by regularly contacting mentors, children, and caregivers to uncover and help resolve problems that were occurring in the relationship. In addition, BBBS trained the new mentors.

Amachi is a program for BBBS and a ministry for the churches. While the volunteers recruited through congregations are BBBS mentors, they are also Amachi mentors within their church community. The project's staffing—the presence of both Church Volunteer Coordinators and Mentor Support Coordinators—reflects and supports this dual reality. One indication of the integration achieved through the partnership is that the mentors, while they see themselves as mentoring through their churches, often use BBBS language to describe their relationships. They may refer to themselves as "Bigs" and their mentees as "Littles," talk about the importance of doing "fun" activities with the children, and speak of their efforts to support their mentees' growth rather than impose their own values on them—all hallmarks of the BBBS approach to mentoring.

A Focus on Accountability

While Amachi provided multiple forms of support to mentors, it also required accountability from both the mentors and their pastors. Data collection was at the center of this effort and was used to monitor performance and provide feedback so potential problems could be quickly addressed.

CVCs collected monthly information from each of their congregation's mentors, including the number of meetings with the mentee, the total hours they met, what they did together, and the number of times they spoke on the telephone. P/PV then used these data to generate a monthly report for each congregation that provided a snapshot of each of its matches as well as the larger picture of how its mentors were doing as a group.

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Each month, pastors received a report with all of the information for their congregation. So they could compare their congregation's performance to others, they also received a summary of the monthly data for each of the congregations involved in Amachi. In addition, the Amachi director met quarterly with each pastor to review the reports, talk about successes, and discuss ways to address problems.

The reports often provided good news to the pastor: hard evidence of the work the congregation was doing and, thus, motivation to continue. But the reports also clearly communicated when a congregation was not meeting its commitment—and that was intended to serve as a call to action. As one pastor explained, "There was one month when I got the report and the numbers were very low. I actually stood up on the pulpit [during his Sunday sermon] and said I was shamed." When he got his report the next month, he said, "The numbers were better."

Organizing Amachi in Philadelphia

Working from the fundamentals of the Amachi model, the project's planners had to decide how to best structure the initiative in Philadelphia so it could be implemented effectively within the particular characteristics of that city. In Philadelphia, there are approximately 20,000 children, ages 5 to 18, with parents in local jails and state and federal prisons.[12] The city is also geographically large, with many areas of poverty and high crime rates. Given these numbers and the city's size, Amachi planners wanted to find a way to concentrate the project in areas with the greatest need.

By examining Philadelphia crime statistics, they identified the highest-crime zip codes in the city. Then, using this information and their familiarity with local churches, they set geographical boundaries for Amachi in four areas of the city: Southwest Philadelphia, West Kensington, North Philadelphia, and South Philadelphia, encompassing a total of 24 zip codes. Their goal was to recruit 10 churches in each of the four areas, or clusters. Each of the churches would be asked to provide 10 volunteers who would become mentors for children in the community immediately surrounding the church. Because Philadelphia is a city where people identify strongly with the neighborhood in which they live, it seemed most likely that congregations and pastors would respond if they were meeting the needs of children in their own community.

To organize and manage the clusters, Amachi developed a staff position for Community Impact Directors (CIDs). Four CIDs were hired—one for each of the clusters. All four had been involved in their communities and their congregations: two were pastors while the others had backgrounds in human services. Each was responsible for the day-to-day activities of a cluster and worked with both the CVCs and the BBBS Mentor Support Coordinators.

The Role of the "Champion"

Effective mentoring does not happen automatically; nor do effective partnerships between secular and faith-based organizations. While the partnership between BBBS and the congregations was intended to provide the structure and support that would lead to large numbers of volunteers who would be effective mentors, it was also important to have someone who could facilitate the partnership, someone with credibility in both the secular and faith-based communities.

In Philadelphia, Rev. Dr. W. Wilson Goode, Sr., fulfilled that role. Senior Advisor on Faith-Based Initiatives for P/PV and director of the Amachi program, Rev. Goode had been mayor of Philadelphia from 1984 to 1992. He had also, for decades, been deeply involved with the inner-city churches and knew many of the pastors from previous work with them.

Rev. Goode was thus uniquely positioned to provide credibility for Amachi and to mediate, as necessary, between the secular and faith-based institutions. He was key to getting the project up and running quickly, and on a large scale. As the following chapter indicates, he played the crucial role in recruiting both children of prisoners and the pastors whose congregations would provide mentors for them.

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Getting Amachi Up and Running

By November 2000, Amachi was ready to move from planning to implementation. There was much to do. P/PV staff had to identify children who were eligible for Amachi and obtain permission from their parents and caregivers for them to enroll in the program. They also had to recruit pastors who would agree to have their churches sign-on as partners and, in turn, recruit volunteer mentors from their congregations. Finally, BBBS staff would have to screen and train the volunteers and match them with the children.

While this process moved relatively quickly, there were obstacles along the way. Amachi planners were convinced they had a strong program and a compelling message. But, at least early on, they struggled to find the most direct avenues for both locating the children and connecting with the pastors. Once P/PV staff found the most effective approaches, they were able to rapidly recruit pastors and large numbers of volunteers and children. In fact, the numbers were so large that they created their own roadblock: they overwhelmed the resources available for screening the volunteers and matching them with children so the mentoring relationships could begin.

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Locating and Enrolling the Children

In a typical BBBS program, a parent or guardian contacts the agency to request a mentor for her child. But Amachi was targeting precisely those children whose parents or other caregivers had such stressful lives that they were unlikely to learn about and refer their children to a mentoring program. Thus, one early task was to identify, locate, and enroll children who were eligible for Amachi. This proved, at least initially, to be a challenge. The children of incarcerated parents are, after all, "invisible," and, in many cases, their lives are transient as they are moved from one caregiver to another.

P/PV staff went through a trial-and-error process to develop a strategy for identifying the children. It quickly became clear that agencies and institutions were reluctant to participate in the recruiting. An effort to work through Philadelphia's Department of Human Services, whose clients include thousands of at-risk children and youth, was unsuccessful because the agency did not specifically identify children of inmates during its intake process. And even when it knew of such children, it would not reveal their names because of concerns about confidentiality. Conversations with some of the pastors whose congregations would become involved with Amachi indicated that they, too, did not wish to participate in identifying the children. While their churches were located in areas where large numbers of these children lived, the pastors did not know which children who came for worship services or weekday programs had parents who were incarcerated. And they were reluctant to publicly ask for names from their congregation members because they felt it could stigmatize the children and their families.

As a result of these experiences, P/PV staff decided to go directly to the prisons to try to obtain the names of inmates' children. While this ultimately proved to be an effective strategy, there was a further process of trial-and-error before they were able to connect with the prison personnel who could provide access to the inmates.

Focusing on the Philadelphia Prison System, the Amachi director, Rev. Goode, initially contacted prison chaplains at five local jails and asked for their help. However, the chaplains had been involved with previous efforts to work with families of inmates, and those efforts had been unsuccessful. Fearing a repeat, and also concerned about confidentiality, they were reluctant to provide direct help.

But the chaplains did help Rev. Goode connect with the prisons' social workers, who were in contact with inmates on an ongoing basis and knew many of their family histories. With the cooperation of the social workers, P/PV staff posted large signs describing the mentoring program and provided the social workers with forms that inmates could complete with information about their children they wanted to enroll in the program. P/PV expected to receive a flood of names. But after a month, only a few forms had been completed and returned.

Talking to Inmates

The trial-and-error process came to an end when Rev. Goode was able to work with the Philadelphia Prison System's Division of Inmate Services to gain access to the cellblocks and deliver the message directly to inmates. His presentations were brief and straightforward. He described the risks to children of incarcerated parents, the demonstrated outcomes of strong mentoring relationships, and the Amachi program. He distributed written materials about Amachi in both English and Spanish, along with forms that parents could use to sign up their children and provide information about where they were living so P/PV staff could contact the caregivers.

Prison administrators organized the visits: scheduling times for the presentations, assigning correctional officers and social workers to assist Rev. Goode, and providing information about prison regulations. For example, while Amachi was able to bring pencils to the meetings so inmates could complete the forms, it was important to know that pencils were controlled items: prisoners did not normally have access to them. In fact, during the presentations, the pencils became a topic of conversation that helped break down the wall between Amachi and the inmates.

Rev. Goode made presentations to women and men at separate meetings. In general, the male prisoners were a less receptive audience. Many of the fathers did not have a relationship with their child or the child's caretaker. In addition, those presentations were to larger groups—with up to 100 men attending, as opposed to 30 or 40 at each of the meetings with women—and the large size may have contributed to creating a less responsive atmosphere. Still, about half the men who said they had children completed forms to enroll them in the program.

While many of the male prisoners kept a watchful distance from Amachi, the women embraced it. Most of the women had children; and after each presentation, close to 90 percent of those women completed enrollment forms for them.

Even women whose children were not eligible—if, for example, they lived outside of Philadelphia—asked to fill out forms so their children would be identified if an Amachi program was started in the area where they lived. Women also wanted to know if other children they had been caring for before they went to prison—nieces, nephews, or cousins—were eligible for Amachi. One woman completed an enrollment form for her grandson. Her own son, the child's father, was also in prison.

During a period of four months, Rev. Goode made presentations to groups of inmates at five local prisons. The results were overwhelming. The incarcerated parents completed enrollment forms for almost 2,000 children who were potential candidates for an Amachi mentor. The next step was to locate these children.

Contacting the Caregivers

On the forms that inmates filled out, they included the name of the child's current caregiver and that person's address and phone number. The children had a number of different living arrangements. In cases where the father was in prison, the children were often living with their mother. The reverse was far less frequently true when the mother was in prison. Then, children might be living with a grandparent, aunt, or other relative, or have been placed in a foster home.

P/PV staff set to work contacting each of the caregivers to let them know the mentoring program was available and to try to gain authorization for the child to participate. They began by sending a letter that described Amachi so that caregivers would be introduced to the program before staff followed up with a phone call.

The callers learned a few quick lessons. First, because the children moved so often, the contact information for nearly half of them was inaccurate or out of date. And when they did reach the caregivers by phone, they discovered that almost no one had read the letter. Their calls about Amachi were "cold calls"—they had to "sell" the program to people who, a moment earlier, had no idea that it existed. They also learned that they had to approach the caregivers carefully. Many of them had a hostile relationship with the incarcerated parent. Thus, a recommendation from the inmate could mean a sure rejection by the caregiver.

But most of the caregivers welcomed the opportunity for the child to have a mentor. Callers had accurate enough information to reach the caregivers for about a thousand of the children whose names had been gathered through the

Table 1:
Mentee Demographics

	Number	Percentage
Total Number of Mentees	517	–
Mentee Gender:		
Male	238	47%
Female	270	53%
Missing gender	9	–
Mentee Age:		
5 to 7 years old	119	25%
8 to 9 years old	99	21%
10 to 12 years old	160	34%
13 to 15 years old	87	18%
16 to 18 years old	6	1%
Missing age	46	–

Source: Amachi Year Longitudinal Report, April 1, 2001–March 31, 2003.

prisons. Of those, about one-fifth of the children turned out to be ineligible, either because they were living outside the Amachi geographic area or because they were not in the 5-to-18-year-old age range. However, caregivers for more than four-fifths of the remaining 800 children agreed to have them participate in Amachi.

During the initial two years of operations, 517 children were paired with mentors. Reflecting the national demographics for children of incarcerated parents, many of them were very young when they entered the program. (See Table 1.) Only 19 percent were 13 or older, while 21 percent were 8 or 9 years old, and 25 percent were 7 or younger.

Forming Partnerships with Congregations

In Amachi, congregations were envisioned as active partners that were deeply involved in the initiative. To achieve this vision, it was important to help them see that the mentoring program was consistent with their church's mission and would, in fact, contribute to fulfilling that mission. The key was to make the connection between the challenges faced by children of incarcerated parents, the community surrounding the church, and the skills, gifts, and talents of congregation members. If pastors and members saw the children as their neighbors and understood how their efforts could help them, they would take an active role in reaching out.

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The first step was to deliver the message to the pastors. If they responded to the message, they would, in turn, deliver it to their congregation members. But the challenge was to find a way to make contact with the pastors. As with its efforts in recruiting children, Amachi had to be patient and persistent as it evolved a strategy for finding its audience.

Recruiting Pastors

Using knowledge drawn from previous relationships with churches, augmented by discussions with several pastors in the areas of the city they were targeting, Amachi planners developed a list of churches that seemed likely candidates to become involved in the mentoring project. They were particularly interested in attracting churches that had a significant percentage of congregation members who lived in the community, rather than commuting to Sunday services from other areas of the city or the suburbs. Beyond that criterion, however, the churches they identified varied widely in size, from fewer than a hundred members to more than a thousand; and they represented a range of Protestant denominations. (See the boxed page for an overview of the churches that joined Amachi.)

There was a two-stage process for selecting which churches on the list would become partners in the project. First, Rev. Goode would meet individually with the pastor at each church to talk about Amachi and learn whether they were interested. Then, where there was interest, he would return to meet again and complete a Church Overview Form, which included questions on such topics as the size of the congregation, the church's prior outreach efforts, and its current youth ministry. That second visit was intended to help Amachi deepen the pastor's commitment and be sure that the church would be able to follow through with its responsibilities to the mentoring project.

The Challenge of Making Contact

Among the pastors that Amachi planners wanted to contact, about a third had full-time staff at their church. In those cases, it was relatively easy to call the church, speak to staff, and schedule an appointment to meet with the pastor. Many of the others, however, were part-time pastors and kept their own calendars; it was necessary to speak to them directly to set up an appointment. Even Rev. Goode, who had worked with many of those pastors in the past, was initially caught off guard by the difficulty of reaching them.

An Overview of the Churches

The churches that became the first Amachi partners in Philadelphia are all Protestant denominations. Approximately half are Baptist, while the other half include Pentecostal, Lutheran, United Methodist, A.M.E., Seventh-Day Adventist, and a number of non-affiliated denominations. They range widely in size, in the percentage of members who live in the community, and in their previous experience with youth outreach and programming. The following information is drawn from Church Overview Forms completed by the pastors and includes data from 39 of the original 42 Amachi churches.

Number of people enrolled in the congregation:

Fewer than 100: 5 churches
100-200: 8 churches
200-300: 8 churches
300-500: 8 churches
500-999: 3 churches
1,000 or more: 7 churches

Number who attend Sunday worship (suggesting some level of involvement):

Fewer than 100: 8 churches
100-200: 8 churches
200-300: 11 churches
300-500: 6 churches
More than 500: 6 churches

Approximate percentage of members living within a five-block radius of the church:

Less than 25 percent: 14 churches
25-49 percent: 11 churches
50-74 percent: 7 churches
At least 75 percent: 7 churches

Youth outreach ministries:

Before their involvement in Amachi, approximately three-quarters of the churches had some kind of outreach program for children and youth. These included Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts; community service; after-school programs, including tutoring and homework help; Saturday enrichment programs (music, drama, tutoring, Bible class); computer literacy; discussion groups on youth issues, including problem-solving and conflict resolution; youth choir; dance groups; field trips; sports; summer day camp; and vacation Bible school. Among the churches with programs, anywhere from 5 to more than 100 children and youth regularly attended an activity during the week. Pastors all said that adult volunteers—the number was most often between 10 and 30—were actively involved in running the programming.

Mentoring programs before Amachi:

Among the churches, 12 said they had a mentoring program, although they were not structured one-to-one programs with formal matches. They included fellowship groups where adults and youth did activities together, such as monthly trips; groups, facilitated by adults, where youth discussed issues in their lives; and tutoring programs where adult tutors also developed informal mentoring relationships with the children.

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P/PV staff tried to contact the pastors by leaving messages on the churches' answering machines, but few of those messages resulted in a return call. They also made personal visits to some of the churches and left cards with custodians; but again, this process led to few responses. In some instances, they were able to find home numbers for the pastors in the telephone book, and messages left there met with more success. When pastors did return those calls, P/PV was able to get from them either their direct church number or, best of all, their cell phone number.

Still, there were many pastors who could not be reached in this way, and their busy schedules made them difficult to track down. Finally, P/PV staff used the churches' outdoor bulletin boards to learn which nights Bible study and prayer meetings were held, and organized personal visits to the churches on those nights. Rev. Goode would arrive a few minutes before the start of the program to visit with the pastor and obtain the necessary contact information, especially the valuable cell phone number.

Delivering the Message

Once the contact information had been obtained, it became possible to call the pastors directly and make an appointment to discuss the project. Rev. Goode made the initial visits. Having not talked with many of the pastors for a period of years, he wanted to re-establish a relationship with them and convey his personal interest in Amachi.

His presentation to each pastor was brief and direct, and paralleled the presentations made to incarcerated parents. It focused on the nature of the problem—the 20,000 children of inmates in Philadelphia and the risks faced by those children, a number of whom lived in the community where the church was located. It described the benefits of mentoring and the crucial role the congregation could play in addressing the problem. Rev. Goode also undergirded his presentation with a strong theological foundation. Often, he spoke of Isaiah, who had a vision for a troubled city: "Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings" (Isaiah 58:12, New International Version).

Almost all of the pastors embraced Amachi. Of the 50 churches involved in the initial interviews, all but three expressed strong interest in the project. One of the three had a recently installed pastor who did not feel the time was right for his congregation to become involved. The other two expressed theological

and philosophical reservations about participating.[13] Five additional churches did not seem ready to make the commitment necessary for ensuring the program's success.

Rev. Goode returned to the remaining 42 churches to meet again with the pastors and complete the Church Overview Form. This second meeting was also an opportunity to answer additional questions that pastors had regarding Amachi and to discuss the type of dependable volunteers the project was seeking as mentors. To ensure that all potential volunteers received a consistent message and that it was the same message that had been presented to the pastor, Rev. Goode also provided pastors with written material about the mentoring project that they could pass on to members of their congregation.

What Attracted Pastors to Amachi?

For the pastors of Philadelphia's inner-city congregations, the Amachi message hit close to home. Many described themselves, in the words of one pastor, as "neighborhood ministries, neighborhood churches." They knew that the communities where their churches were located had many families with at least one member who was, or had been, in prison. And they realized that they had often failed to see the children who suffered as a result—one pastor described them as "a faceless, voiceless group that nobody has been speaking up for."

The fact that the message was delivered by Rev. Goode played a role in helping pastors feel receptive to Amachi. He had long-established credibility among the inner-city churches, and pastors heard his message about the children. As another pastor explained:

> *We had prison outreach and youth study groups. But when Rev. Goode came to see me, I immediately recognized that in our mission we had totally overlooked one group and their particular needs. Sometimes you don't see the innocent victims.*

Thus, Amachi was not only consistent with the churches' mission; it provided an opportunity for them to extend their mission by reaching out to address needs in their community that had previously been unseen. "It was like a wake-up call for us," one pastor said. "It made the church aware of what we need to do as a church." And, they believed, it could help awaken congregation members to turn their faith into action. By making the commitment to mentor a child, one pastor said, "The people in the church get to practice what is preached, what they testify about. The sermon is okay. But the practical side, forgive me Lord, it is a powerful teacher."

While Amachi would help the congregations extend and fulfill their missions, it was also important to pastors that there was a structure provided for them to work within and resources to support that structure. Amachi had clearly defined roles and responsibilities. What was asked of each church was specific and far from overwhelming: 10 mentors who would each commit to meeting with a child for at least one hour a week for one year; a limited amount of paperwork, including the monthly collection of data on mentors' and children's meetings; and a coordinator who would manage Amachi at that church. The church was not responsible for recruiting children, screening or training mentors, making the matches, or providing the forms of support and supervision that were to be handled by BBBS. And Amachi would provide funding for the coordinator's position and to help cover other expenses.

"It was a program that brought its own support," said one pastor. "It gave us resources, manpower, to extend what we were doing. Amachi did the organizing for us." Or, in the words of another pastor, it provided the church with "the ability to go into the community in a systematic form and reach children that need support and guidance."

The buy-in from the pastors was a key step in the process. Next, the pastors had to convey the message to their congregations and inspire the members to reach out as mentors.

Recruiting Mentors

The pastors got right to work recruiting volunteers. Some spoke individually to members of the congregation who they believed would make good mentors. Others made announcements at worship services and church meetings to ask people who were interested to step forward. A number of pastors also invited Rev. Goode to come to the church and speak about Amachi.

Within a few months, this process produced the names of nearly 400 potential mentors from the 42 churches. Each of the volunteers had to go through BBBS's rigorous screening process. This included completing an application form, being interviewed by BBBS staff, and undergoing a criminal background check and a child abuse clearance. Each was also required to provide three references, and one of those references had to be from their pastor.

Pastors' reasons for recommending specific members of their congregations suggest some of the attributes that volunteers would be bringing to their role as mentors. Some people were recommended because of their experience as volunteers in other youth ministries at the church. Some were recommended because of their relevant work experience—for example, as a school teacher, mental health worker, youth worker, or police officer. Others were recommended because of their own experiences growing up: "raised without a father and mentored by church family and greatly concerned about children in a similar situation," a pastor wrote about one volunteer; "has experience with a parent who is incarcerated"; "has a great deal of experience dealing with issues surrounding grief and loss." Other people were recommended because they were "a loving grandmother" or "good parent." And in still other cases, pastors pointed to personal qualities that are essential for successful mentors: "a very warm person who cares about children and their needs"; "communicates well"; and, simply, "a good listener."[14]

In at least one important respect, the volunteers recruited through Amachi differed from volunteers in a typical mentoring program. While the percentages of male and female mentors were comparable to other programs, Amachi attracted a much higher percentage of African Americans. Studies have found that, across mentoring programs, 15 to 20 percent of adult volunteers are members of a racial minority,[15] and programs—particularly those that strive to match children with mentors of the same race—are constantly looking for ways to increase that percentage. In Amachi, however, 82 percent of mentors were African American and an additional 8 percent were Latino/a. (See Table 2.) In addition, 34 percent were African-American males—a significant percentage. For most mentoring programs, this is the most difficult group of volunteers to attract, and one that programs are most interested in recruiting so they can be paired with African-American male children who might otherwise be growing up without a supportive male adult of the same race who is a consistent presence in their lives.

Amachi volunteers also tended to be somewhat older than volunteers in typical community-based mentoring programs. In one broad survey of programs, for example, 12 percent of mentors were age 21 or younger; 69 percent were 22 to 49; and 19 percent were 50 or older.[16] While the percentage of 22- to 49-year-old mentors was comparable in Amachi, there was a higher percentage of older volunteers—26 percent were more than 50 years old.

Table 2:
Mentor Demographics

	Number	Percentage
Total Number of Mentors	482	–
Mentor Gender:		
Male	200	42%
Female	277	58%
Missing gender	5	–
Mentor Age:		
17 to 21 years old	24	5%
22 to 30 years old	83	18%
31 to 40 years old	97	22%
41 to 50 years old	124	28%
51 to 60 years old	74	16%
More than 60 years old	47	10%
Missing age	33	–
Mentor Race:		
African American	379	82%
Latino/a	38	8%
Caucasian	34	7%
Other	11	2%
Missing race	20	–

Source: Amachi Year Longitudinal Report, April 1, 2001-March 31, 2003.

The Challenge of Getting the Matches Started

The speed with which large numbers of volunteers and children were recruited created its own obstacle to getting the actual project activities—mentoring—up and running. Despite some concern on the part of Amachi planners that volunteers might feel resistant about going through the screening process, most of them quickly completed the required paperwork.[17] Next, BBBS had to conduct the criminal history background checks and child abuse clearances; contact references listed on the application forms; interview volunteers, children, and the children's caregivers; make the matches; and provide training to the new mentors.

But, as one Amachi planner explained, "The program took off faster than we had ever anticipated." The local BBBS agency, Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern Pennsylvania, was responsible for the screening, matching, and training process, as well as for monitoring and supporting the matches once they began. Before Amachi, it had been overseeing fewer than 800 mentoring

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relationships. Suddenly, it had hundreds of additional volunteers to interview, screen, and train; hundreds of caregivers to contact; and hundreds of children to interview and match. Marlene Olshan, now the CEO of that organization, says the numbers were "unprecedented in the history of the agency. We didn't yet have the systems in place" that would make it possible to keep up.

All volunteer agencies worry that if they do not put volunteers quickly to work, they might lose interest and be lost to the agency forever. As BBBS began taking steps to develop the computer and management capacity it saw it would need to rapidly screen and match the Amachi mentors, its Mentor Support Coordinators kept in contact with the volunteers to help maintain their interest and keep them committed. P/PV also held orientation meetings for the volunteers, and the Church Volunteer Coordinators regularly talked to volunteers from their congregation to keep them up to date on what progress was taking place. In addition, P/PV staff re-contacted the caregivers who had given permission for their children to enroll in Amachi to let them know that, despite the delay, the program was moving forward.

BBBS representatives met weekly with P/PV staff and the Community Impact Directors to work through the roadblock, and gradually, the agency was able to increase the pace of the screening and matching process. By April 2001, the first Amachi mentors were meeting with their children.

AMACHI IN ACTION

During its initial two years of operations—from April 2001 through March 2003—Amachi made 556 matches between volunteer mentors and children of incarcerated parents. This chapter examines those matches. It discusses how the children and adults spent their time together; how often they met; the challenges volunteers faced in building relationships with their mentees; and how long the matches have lasted and why some have terminated. Finally, it looks at early indications of how children may be benefiting from the relationships.

HOW DID MENTORS AND CHILDREN SPEND THEIR TIME TOGETHER?

Amachi is a community-based mentoring program. Each mentor-child pair decides on the time and location of each meeting and the activities they will do together. These activities vary widely. (See Table 3 for an overview.) Mentors go to the movies or cultural events with their mentees, have a meal with them, and sometimes take them to church services or youth activities at the church, such as choir practice or birthday parties. Occasionally, the mentor helps with schoolwork. Often, the two just "hang out" together. Many of the mentors refer to the children as "their family" and like to take them along on family outings.

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Table 3:
Number and Percentage of Mentors Reported Engaging in Given Activities During a Sample Month*

	Number	Percentage
Total Matches with Contact	253	–
School work	22	9%
Playing sports	16	6%
Sporting event, movie, theater	52	21%
Eating a meal	99	39%
Attending church services	52	21%
Attending other church activities	41	16%
Just "hanging out"	139	55%
Other	146	58%

Source: Amachi Year Longitudinal Report, April 1, 2001-March 31, 2003.
*Data are for the month of December 2002.

These activities are intended to be fun for both the volunteers and children—and, in the words of one pastor, "to add some kind of happiness" to the children's lives. They also, as another pastor noted, give the children opportunities to see a life beyond their immediate surroundings. Mentoring exposes them to the arts, to culture, to other people, to the larger world. "People are always the product of their environment," he said. "If their environment is small, their lives are small."

Most importantly, though, regularly spending time together in activities allows the child to gradually see the mentor as a reliable, supportive adult, and this helps the pair form the kind of adult-child friendship that exemplifies strong mentoring relationships. One pastor explained:

> *The children really want to be with people they feel are positive. They're looking for people...who are going to spend time, that's going to be consistent time they can depend on, that's not going to be broken.*

Mentors have noted how important it feels to the children to "have their own special time." As one mentor observed:

> *[My mentee] is possessive of me. She doesn't want her sisters [who also have mentors] to come with us. She says, "I need to have my time." She needs her time away from it all, having this one person who's just about her, who wants to know for real how her day is. For her, it's exciting; it's very exciting. There's someone who's just for her.*

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For children who are growing up amidst the particular challenges created by having an incarcerated parent, this kind of stability can be especially important. One pastor referred to it as "helping children see there is another side to the madness." A mentor who likes to have her mentee come to her house for a meal described it more concretely: "Just to have them come into your home and see order, just to see you preparing dinner—that's important to them."

How Often Did the Mentors and Children Meet?

The volunteers committed to meeting with their mentee for an hour a week over the course of a year. On average, however, the pairs met for almost double the required hours, but less often than four times a month. Data for matches that were active on March 31, 2003, show that over the course of the match, mentors were spending an average of 7.3 hours per month with their mentee, and they had an average of two meetings a month. (See Table 4.) Thus, they were spending a little under 3 3/4 hours together at each meeting. Given the reality of community-based mentoring—where, often, a mentor takes the child out for an activity and they spend time traveling together as well as engaging in the activity—this seems logical; and, in fact, it is consistent with the length of meetings in the successful BBBS matches that were studied in the mid-1990s.[18]

Table 4:
Active Matches—Mean and Maximum Number of Hours and Days Mentors and Children Met per Month*

	Hours		Days	
	Mean	Maximum	Mean	Maximum
All Active Matches	7.3	22.3	2.0	5.4
Matches Active for:				
2-3 months	4.6	11.8	1.4	3.5
4-6 months	5.8	19.0	1.6	4.8
7-9 months	5.1	19.6	1.8	4.1
10-12 months	6.5	20.2	1.9	4.3
13+ months	8.5	22.3	2.3	5.4

Source: Amachi Year Longitudinal Report, April 1, 2001-March 31, 2003.
*Table includes 308 active matches: matches with only one month of activity are excluded.

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The Amachi matches included in those data had been meeting for anywhere from 2 to 24 months. In general, the longer the match had lasted, the more time the mentor and child were spending together each month. Matches that had been active for 2 to 3 months had met an average of 4.6 hours a month over their lifetime, while matches that had been active for 13 months or longer had met an average of 8.5 hours a month. In large part, this may simply indicate that in stronger matches—those that develop and endure—the mentor and child were spending more time together from the beginning. But it also suggests that, at least in some cases, the pair spent increasing amounts of time together as trust and closeness developed.

What Challenges Did Amachi Mentors Encounter?

Mentoring is not easy. Like mentors in any BBBS community-based program, Amachi volunteers faced a number of obstacles to establishing a trusting relationship with their mentee. And because, for the most part, the children involved in Amachi lead unusually disrupted and stressful lives, these obstacles could take particularly obdurate forms.

Evaluations of mentoring programs have consistently shown that programs have to provide support for mentors to help them deal with these obstacles so that the relationships have the opportunity to grow and, ultimately, lead to positive outcomes for children and youth.[9] To help volunteers address the sometimes intense challenges of mentoring children of incarcerated parents, Amachi built in a support-rich environment in which mentors had regular contact with both their Church Volunteer Coordinator and the BBBS Mentor Support Coordinator. The project also monitored the matches through monthly data collection so it could quickly identify which mentor-child pairs were not meeting and address problems that were interfering with the match.

Amachi volunteers faced a continuum of challenges. Like many mentors, they often felt they were struggling early in the relationships. Building trust with a child whom one has met through a programmatically arranged match can require patience and persistence. Although BBBS training prepared mentors for this reality, Church Volunteer Coordinators noted that some of the mentors initially felt discouraged. "We have to keep reminding them to hang in there; relationships take time," one CVC said. And, in fact, when children have experienced the loss of a parent through incarceration, it can make the process of

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building trust more difficult because, in the children's experience, adults do not stay around for the long term.

Mentors also had to learn to set boundaries about how much money they spent. Sometimes the pressure was created by the mentee or the mentee's family. As one pastor explained:

> *A big problem is that parents might see mentors as a Santa Claus, with trips to the malls and buying things. The relationship should not be based on material things, in any case. But, in addition, it can be a financial strain for the mentors. Mentors come from modest homes. They have more time than money.*

But mentors also put pressure on themselves, "feeling the need," one pastor said, "to bring food and sometimes also clothes" for the child.

Similarly, the volunteers sometimes found themselves entangled in, and feeling overwhelmed by, problems the children and their families were struggling with. "We have to be clear with the mentors that they aren't therapists or social workers," noted a CVC. "They are there to form a relationship with the kids, not fix everything."

Even as those early problems were resolved and the mentoring relationship developed and became closer, a new challenge could arise. The child's parent or caretaker sometimes felt that her own role was being threatened and began to put up obstacles to the relationship. An Amachi mentor, who is also a CVC, said:

> *The hardest part of being a mentor is dealing with caregivers. I've been with my mentee for two years; and over that time, we've developed a strong relationship. She's begun to confide in me. All along, I've been taking her on family outings, but now her mother has become jealous and won't let her go on the outings with my family.*

Beyond these issues, Amachi mentors had to adapt to the sometimes chaotic circumstances of the children's lives. At least some of the children frequently did not show up for agreed-upon meetings with their mentor, or were not home when the mentor arrived to pick them up. Sometimes a child would be moved to a different caretaking arrangement, and the relationship had to be suspended until BBBS could get formal permission from the new caretaker for the match to continue. And when an incarcerated parent returned home from prison, this created an additional challenge for volunteers, who had to temporarily pull back from their connection to the child until they saw whether their mentoring relationship would proceed in these new circumstances.

Table 5:
Number of Matches, Mentors, and Mentees

	Number	Percentage
Total Number of Matches	556	–
Number of Active Matches	312	56%
Number of Terminated Matches	244	44%
Number terminated before less than a year	165	30%
Number ended after completing a year or longer	79	14%
Total Number of Mentors	482	–
Number of Active Mentors	294	61%
Number who have had more than one match	70	14%
Total Number of Mentees	517	–
Number of Active Mentees	309	60%
Number who have been re-matched	38	7%

Source: Amachi Year Longitudinal Report, April 1, 2001 March 31, 2003.

How Long Have the Relationships Lasted —and Why Did Some End?

Despite the sometimes intensified challenges involved in mentoring children of incarcerated parents, a high percentage of Amachi matches have remained active over time. Of the 556 mentor-child matches created from April 2001 through March 2003, 312 matches, or 56 percent, were active as of the end of March 2003. (See Table 5.) Of those, 189 have already been meeting for 12 months or longer.

An additional 244 matches have ended. In 79 of those cases, volunteers fulfilled their commitment to mentor for at least a year and then elected not to continue with the relationship. Many of those matches lasted longer than 12 months. In fact, more than one-third of them lasted for 18 months or longer.

The remaining 165 matches—or 30 percent of the matches overall—terminated in less than 12 months. As Table 6 illustrates, the majority of those matches ended because of circumstances surrounding the children, and it suggests the extent to which many of their lives are marked by complications and disruptions. In some cases, those circumstances are unique to the children involved in Amachi.

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Table 6:
Matches that Lasted Less than a Year: Reasons Given for Termination

	Number	Percentage
Total Number of Matches Terminated After Less Than a Year	165	–
Child moved out of area	33	22%
Child's family structure changed	6	4%
Child did not want relationship to continue	9	6%
Mentor no longer has time	16	11%
Mentor moved out of area	25	16%
Mentor did not want relationship to continue	5	3%
Parent/guardian did not want relationship to continue	36	24%
Incarcerated parent returned and terminated relationship	17	11%
Other	5	3%
Missing	13	

Source: Amachi Year Longitudinal Report, April 1, 2001-March 31, 2003.

In a typical BBBS community-based match, a parent or guardian has approached the agency to request a mentor for her or his child. In Amachi, however, a parent or caregiver was approached by the program, introduced to Amachi, and asked to give permission so the child could be matched with a mentor. Given this circumstance, it is perhaps not surprising that a large percentage (24 percent) of the terminated matches ended because the parent or caregiver ultimately changed her or his mind and did not want the child to continue in the mentoring relationship. Another 11 percent of the matches that ended did so because the incarcerated parent returned home and did not want the relationship to continue. And the fact that children of incarcerated parents lead particularly transient lives also had a significant impact on the length of matches: 22 percent of those that terminated in less than a year did so because the child moved away from the area.

Overall, 86 of the matches that were terminated in less than a year ended because the child moved or a parent or caregiver did not want the match to continue. A high percentage of the volunteers—70 mentors—whose matches terminated for these reasons remained with Amachi and were re-matched with another child.

As Table 6 also illustrates, approximately 30 percent of the matches that ended in less than a year did so because of circumstances connected to the mentor, such as moving away from the community, altered work schedules, or other

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changes in their lives that affected their time or ability to continue. Among the 46 children whose matches were terminated for these reasons, Amachi was able to re-match 38 with new mentors.

How Are the Children Benefiting?

Amachi is still a very young program, and it is too soon for a rigorous evaluation of outcomes. However, early indications—and, specifically, the duration of many of the Amachi matches—suggest that it is making a difference in the lives of children who are involved in the mentoring relationships.

Outcomes and the Length of Relationships

P/PV's evaluation of Big Brothers Big Sisters demonstrated that children and youth whose matches last longer are more likely to show improvement in their behaviors and attitudes than are those whose matches are shorter.[20] Relationships of short duration probably do not allow adequate time to develop the mutual trust and respect necessary for real growth to occur on the part of the mentee. But how long do relationships have to be for positive changes to begin to occur?

The BBBS research demonstrated that 12 months is the point where positive outcomes start to appear. That study divided mentees into four groups according to the length of time they were matched with an adult: matches that terminated in less than 3 months, in 3 to 5 months, and in 6 to 12 months, and matches that were still active after more than 12 months. The threshold was for relationships that lasted more than 12 months. Children and youth in those relationships (as compared to similar youth who were not in a mentoring relationship):

- Felt more confident about doing their school work,
- Skipped fewer days of school,
- Had higher grades, and
- Were less likely to start using drugs or alcohol.

There were no positive impacts shown in relationships lasting less than 6 months. For children and youth in relationships that lasted 6 to 12 months, the one positive outcome was that they skipped fewer days of school.

Table 7:
Duration of Mentor-Mentee Relationships

Length of Relationship	Number of Matches	Percentage
Total Number of Matches	399*	–
Ended in less than 3 months	16	4%
Ended in 3 to 5 months	35	9%
Ended in 6 to 12 months	102	25%
Lasted more than 12 months	246**	62%

Source: Tabulations from Amachi match data.
*Includes only matches that began more than 13 months ago.
**Of these matches, 181 are still meeting.

Table 7 describes the length of relationships in Amachi. The findings compare favorably to those from the BBBS programs studied by P/PV. In the BBBS evaluation, 46 percent of the matches were still active after a year, while 62 percent of Amachi matches have lasted a year or longer.

It is not possible to make a direct comparison between the BBBS and Amachi findings because the BBBS matches were tracked over a period of 18 months while the Amachi data are based on a period of 24 months. In addition, Amachi may, in part, have a higher percentage of long-term matches because the children being mentored are, on average, younger than those included in the BBBS evaluation. Most of those mentees were 10 to 14 years old, while Amachi includes a high percentage of children under 10, and younger children are less likely to decide on their own that they want to opt out of a mentoring relationship. Beyond that, however, the data are a strong indication that Amachi has been able to recruit volunteers who can be effective mentors and that its highly structured partnership has been particularly successful in supporting the relationships so they are able to develop and endure.

Importantly, the data also suggest that the children involved in Amachi are benefiting in ways comparable to the children whose outcomes were measured in the BBBS evaluation. Because the Amachi children are generally somewhat younger than the mentees in the BBBS study, some specific outcomes—perhaps particularly "less likely to start using drugs or alcohol"—may be less directly relevant. However, what seems most significant is reaching the threshold of meeting for more than 12 months, the point at which the relationship starts to make a difference in the lives of children and youth.

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BBBS Surveys

Data collected by Big Brothers Big Sisters provide support for these indications that Amachi is benefiting the children. After matches had been meeting for a year, BBBS administered questionnaires to mentors and to the children's parent or caregiver asking about improvements in the mentee's attitudes and behaviors.

Ninety-three percent of mentors and 82 percent of parents/caregivers reported that the child had shown improved self-confidence; and 61 and 60 percent, respectively, said the child had an improved "sense of future." The majority of both mentors and parents/caregivers also reported that the child showed improved academic performance and classroom behavior. BBBS administers the same questionnaire in its other community-based programs, and preliminary findings from those surveys suggest that Amachi, thus far, is as successful as those programs.[21]

As Amachi matures, one of its challenges will be to foster relationships that continue over the long term, beyond a year. An explicit goal of the project is to lessen the number of children of incarcerated parents who become involved in the criminal justice system themselves. The relationship with a reliable, caring adult who nurtures the child's positive growth and development is seen as a key support for helping to break the chain of criminal activity that too often descends from one generation to the next.

Speaking about his hope for the mentoring program, a pastor said, "When statistics show that the number of children who follow their parents into prison has declined, then we will know Amachi works." It will be several years before those outcomes can begin to be measured. Many of the children in Amachi are very young, and both mentors and pastors are aware that the mentees may need extended support. Although the first matches were made only 24 months ago, close to 100 mentors have been with their child for 22 months or longer, and pastors speak of wanting to keep the volunteers involved for as long as possible. "For me, the bottom line is, what is this going to look like in five or six years," a pastor explained. "If the majority of children in this program do not come in contact with the criminal justice system, then the program is working. And if that is true, then we're looking at a very small thing to do to impact the lives of children."

CONCLUSION

Amachi was able to get up and running quickly, and on a scale that was larger than is typical for new programs. During its initial two years of operations, it mobilized nearly 500 volunteers and matched them with children of incarcerated parents—children who could particularly benefit from having a consistent, supportive adult in their lives but who were invisible to mentoring programs until they were located and recruited by Amachi. And while Amachi is still too early in its history for a rigorous evaluation of outcomes, the fact that a large number of mentors have been successful in building long-term relationships with the children provides a promising early indication that they are making a difference in the lives of their mentees.

Amachi is, thus, in a relatively unique situation. Although a new program, it is large enough that its early experiences provide useful lessons in what would be required for it to achieve significant scale. Given the growing recognition of the special issues confronting children of incarcerated parents and the federal government's commitment to provide resources that support mentors for these children, the early lessons from Amachi's experience are particularly timely for policymakers, funders, and practitioners.

What, then, were the critical elements that contributed to the project's early successes?

1. *A combination of four factors was essential: structure, management, commitment, and resources.*

New programs are often built on the commitment and charisma of one leader. Those programs may be implemented successfully in one or a few locations on a relatively small scale, and can seem promising to policymakers and funders as they search for successful approaches for addressing a defined social problem. But too often, when a small program attempts to grow to scale, it struggles, makes compromises, and loses its focus—and, thus, becomes unlikely to lead to the outcomes it was designed to achieve.

Implementing Amachi clearly required highly committed leadership. But it was able to grow quickly to a reasonably large scale and establish the groundwork for further expansion because the leadership was working within a context of three other key factors: a solid structure, close management, and adequate resources.

The project is structured around a partnership that includes clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and accountability; and that structure was built on a foundation of research on the benefits of mentoring and effective practices that lead to those benefits. Because Amachi relies on a large number of partners fulfilling their individual responsibilities as well as working together, it has, in the words of one planner, "a lot of moving parts." Thus, a strong system of management—with the ability to handle administrative and financial responsibilities, data collection and analysis, and troubleshooting—was built into the project's design.

Finally, Amachi had the necessary financial resources for planning and implementation. The fact that it had those resources was also a factor in gaining pastors' commitment to the project. Many inner-city communities are wary about people coming to them to ask for their help in implementing new projects—they have too much experience with putting their time, effort, and hope into initiatives that offer promise but do not take hold because there are not adequate resources. With Amachi, pastors felt comfortable that the volunteers from their congregations would be offering their time and effort within a more stable environment.

2. *One partner was an organization that had substantive experience with mentoring and could provide the necessary infrastructure.*

Screening, training, and matching mentors and providing case management for the matches require time and expertise. As evaluations of effective mentoring programs have demonstrated, this kind of strong infrastructure needs to be in

place if matches are going to endure long enough for positive outcomes to occur.[22] Rigorous screening procedures are necessary for gauging the commitment of volunteers and ensuring the children's safety; volunteers require training in effective approaches to mentoring; and supportive relationships are more likely to develop when there is a case manager who is responsible for identifying and resolving problems that are occurring in the matches.

Thus, it was essential to have as a partner an experienced organization such as Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern Pennsylvania that was able to fulfill all of those responsibilities. Congregations do not have the time or expertise to take on those roles—nor are they likely to want to. In fact, pastors said that having this organizational structure and support was important in their decision to join Amachi. It meant that they did not have to be concerned with the infrastructure for the mentoring project. Instead, they were able to focus on their congregations' mission and strengths: reaching out beyond the walls of the church to address needs in their community.

3. The partnership between secular and faith-based organizations was designed to be a "true partnership."

While a strong mentoring organization is an essential component of Amachi, the congregations are also full partners, not just sources of volunteers. Each congregation is, in fact, a small Amachi community that includes the mentors, the Church Volunteer Coordinator, and the pastor, as well as, perhaps, other members of the congregation.

One important function of the secular/faith-based partnership was to provide mentors with access to two different forms of support. BBBS Mentor Support Coordinators followed the agency's well-established guidelines to periodically contact everyone involved in the match—mentor, child, and caregiver—to identify and help address problems that might be arising. Mentors' interactions with the CVCs tended to be more frequent and informal.

While this dual system was effective for helping the matches grow and endure, both BBBS and the CVCs have noted that they need to have stronger communication with one another so that these forms of support are not parallel tracks but, rather, mutually reinforcing efforts. CVCs, for example, may have awareness of some of the ongoing challenges that mentors are facing; and BBBS may have access to resources—including additional training for mentors or referrals to services, such as counseling, for children who are having particular difficulties.

4. There was leadership that was able to bridge the faith and secular communities.

Even while they have common goals, the faith and secular partners have somewhat different perspectives and their own established processes for working towards goals. Thus, it was essential for Amachi to have a person in a leadership position who could negotiate between secular organizations and congregations—who had a commitment to children and to the role that mentoring can have in their lives, and who understood pastors' points of view and was a credible and trusted person in the faith community.

In Philadelphia, Rev. W. Wilson Goode, Sr.—former mayor of the city and currently Senior Advisor on Faith-Based Initiatives for P/PV and director of the Amachi project—provided the "bridging leadership." His role was obviously important for such crucial tasks as recruiting pastors for the project, as well as, on a larger level, trying to ensure that the partners understood one another's institutional language. His leadership was also essential for working through the roadblock that occurred when hundreds of volunteers and children had been recruited before the capacity was fully in place to screen the volunteers, interview the children, and make the mentor-child matches. Given the fact that Amachi was a new project and that it took off with unexpected speed, this situation was not necessarily surprising, but that fact did not make it any less of a problem. Congregations and their volunteers were poised to move forward, while the mentoring organization was scrambling to catch up. It required ongoing communication and negotiation from Amachi leadership to make sure that everyone was able to ultimately arrive together on common ground.

5. A firm system of accountability was a central component of success.

While Amachi built in a strong system of support for mentors, it also demanded accountability. A mentor and child have to meet regularly if there are going to be benefits for the mentee, and thus, the project collected data each month on how often, and for how many hours, every volunteer met with her or his mentee, what activities they did together, and how often they spoke on the telephone.

The data were collected by the CVCs at each church; and Amachi then used the information to generate reports that provided immediate feedback to pastors on how their mentors were performing. This data collection and feedback system was key for keeping pastors involved and motivated, and for keeping churches accountable for ensuring that their mentors were meeting with the children.

Importantly, the system of accountability was also public. Pastors received a monthly detailed report for their congregation; and at the same time, they received a report on how often, and for how many hours, mentors at each of the other Amachi churches met, on average, with their mentees. Thus, they were able to measure their congregation's achievements and challenges against those of every other congregation and gauge their success within the context of the entire project.

Because of its well-defined model and early indications of success, Amachi has attracted a great deal of interest across the country from government officials and secular and faith-based organizations. Locally, the project has already begun to expand. There are now 50 churches involved in the Philadelphia Amachi; and the program in nearby Chester, also a partnership with BBBS Southeastern Pennsylvania, is currently operating through three churches, with seven others in the process of recruiting volunteers. A third Amachi project, in Brooklyn, involves a partnership of 11 churches and Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York.

Amachi is still in the process of evolution. Through a partnership with the Mid-Atlantic Network of Family & Youth Services, the Church Volunteer Coordinators in Philadelphia have become part-time AmeriCorps members. This shift has provided them with opportunities for additional training and, to a degree, strengthened and expanded their role within their church's Amachi program.

As it moves into its next phase in Philadelphia, Amachi is also undergoing a structural modification. Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern Pennsylvania will be assuming responsibility for its management, although the original Amachi director will continue in that role to provide leadership and a strong connection to the congregations. As part of this structural change, the Community Impact Director role—an important element in getting the project up and running locally—will be merged into the BBBS Mentor Support Coordinator position. These changes are intended, among other things, to strengthen direct communication between the partners and increase efficiency, while keeping in place the solid structure that has contributed to the project's successes to date.

As Amachi expands to additional sites around the country, those communities will also need to adapt the model to best meet the particular characteristics of their local circumstances, while retaining the key elements that have contributed

to the program's early success. Drawing from the experiences in Philadelphia, the annual cost of supporting that model should be in the range of $1,200 to $1,500 per match.[23]

Over the longer term, it will be important to study the outcomes for children involved in the program. In general, they are younger than the mentees involved in the BBBS study, and many of them face risks even beyond what the BBBS mentees were experiencing. In addition, Amachi has an explicit long-term goal: to help children develop the positive behaviors and attitudes that will ultimately prevent them from becoming entangled in the criminal justice system.

Given these realities, it seems critical to develop knowledge about how mentoring can most effectively address the challenges experienced by children of incarcerated parents. How long, for example, do mentoring relationships have to be sustained to contribute to this kind of long-term outcome? How can congregations help members stay involved as mentors over extended periods of time? What additional supports do the children need and how might they intersect with the support provided through the mentoring project?

It is only in very recent years that these children have been recognized by even the most concerned members of their own communities. When pastors completed the Church Overview Form as part of the process of becoming an Amachi partner, one of the questions they were asked was about the "approximate number of children regularly served by church ministries who have a parent currently or formerly in jail or prison." Nearly half of the pastors left the item blank because they did not know. They knew that, in their communities, there were many families where at least one person was, or had been, in prison. But their children were invisible.

The congregations, in the words of one pastor, are now "seeing more." And children of incarcerated parents have become more visible elsewhere, as well. Practitioners and policymakers across the country have begun to see them as a special group with heightened risks for becoming involved in the criminal justice system, and they are looking for sound approaches that can help the children overcome obstacles and grow in positive ways.

ENDNOTES

1 "What Happens to Children?" Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, n.d., p. 1. Child Welfare League of America. www.cwla.org/programs/incarcerated/cop_whathappens.htm.

2 Personal communication from Arlene F. Lee. Director, Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, Child Welfare League of America, Inc., April 16, 2003.

3 Denise Johnston, "Children of Criminal Offenders," n.d., pp. 3-4. Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents. www.facsnet.org/specials/youth/johnston-kids.php3.

4 *Senate Report 106-404: Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriation Bill, 2001.* September 8, 2000, p. 56.

5 Christopher J. Mumola. "Incarcerated Parents and Their Children." *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report.* August 2000. U.S. Department of Justice: Washington, DC, p. 4. About 64 percent of mothers in state prison and 84 percent of those in federal prison reported living with their minor children prior to admission, compared to 44 percent and 55 percent of fathers, respectively.

6 "What Happens to Children?," p. 1.

7 Joseph P. Tierney and Jean Baldwin Grossman, with Nancy L. Resch. *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters.* 1995. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

8 Since its inception, Amachi has also received funding from the Corporation for National Service through a partnership with the Mid-Atlantic Network of Youth & Family Services (MANYCorps), as well as TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) funds through the City of Philadelphia. In addition, The William E. Simon Foundation has provided funding for the project.

9 Amachi in Chester is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts. In addition to The Pinkerton Foundation, The Bodman Foundation provides funding for Amachi in Brooklyn.

10 Cynthia L. Sipe. *Mentoring: A Synthesis of P/PV's Research: 1988-1995.* 1996. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

11 Rev. W. Wilson Goode, Sr. *From Clubhouse to Lighthouse: A Dialogical Approach to Congregational Transformation.* May 2000, Doctoral Dissertation. Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

12 Figures are based on the "Angel Tree" list of children in Philadelphia. Prison Fellowship Ministries, 2000.

13 Of the two churches, one felt that the mentoring project should be the work of the government, not the church; the other feared the contamination of the church's prophetic mission and was opposed to federal funding flowing to the church. Even after learning that Amachi

was privately funded, the pastor was still opposed because he felt that one day federal money would become part of the program.

14 All quotations are from the Church Overview Forms completed by churches that are partners in Amachi.

15 See Carla Herrera, Cynthia L. Sipe, and Wendy S. McClanahan. *Mentoring School-Age Children: Relationship Development in Community-Based and School-Based Programs.* April 2000. The National Mentoring Partnership and Public/Private Ventures, p. 18; and Jean E. Rhodes. "What's Race Got To Do With It?" March 2002. *Research Corner.* National Mentoring Partnership. www.mentoring.org/research_corner/mar_background.adp.

16 Herrera, p. 18.

17 See, for example, *Church-Based Mentoring: A Program Manual for Mentoring Ministries,* which suggests that church members might feel uncomfortable about personal interviews and background checks. United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania's Volunteer Centers, 1994.

18 See Jean Baldwin Grossman and Amy Johnson. "Assessing the Effectiveness of Mentoring Programs." *Contemporary Issues in Mentoring,* Jean B. Grossman (ed.) 1999. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

19 Sipe, pp. 9-11.

20 See Grossman for a discussion of the duration of mentor-youth relationships in the BBBS evaluation.

21 "Amachi Evaluation Results." Big Brothers Big Sisters Southeastern Pennsylvania, 2002. The questionnaires were administered to approximately 30 volunteers and 30 parent/caregivers.

22 Sipe, pp. 9-11.

23 The upper part of this range is somewhat higher than the average cost per match found in a 1998 survey of 52 mentoring programs. That cost was $1,114, but the survey included both group mentoring (which is less expensive but untested as an effective intervention) and one-to-one mentoring. The survey also did not examine outcomes for youth in the mentoring programs, so it is not possible to relate the costs to program effectiveness. See Douglas L. Fountain and Amy Arbreton. "The Cost of Mentoring." *Contemporary Issues in Mentoring,* Jean B. Grossman (ed.) 1999. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

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Appendix: Churches Partnering in Amachi in Philadelphia

As of June 2003, the following congregations were participating in the Amachi mentoring project in Philadelphia:

Bethel Temple Community Bible
Beulah Baptist Church
Beulah Tabernacle Church
Bright Hope Baptist Church
Calvary Baptist Church
Calvary Lutheran Church
Christian Compassion Baptist
Christian Union Church
Church of the Redeemer Baptist
Consolation Baptist Church
Cornerstone Baptist
Cornerstone Christian Community
Crusaders for Christ
Eastwick United Methodist
Faith Temple Pentecostal
Fifty-Ninth Street Baptist
First Baptist Church of Wayne*
Germantown Seventh Day Adventist
Gibson Temple Baptist
Greater Exodus Baptist
Greater St. Matthew Baptist
Haven-Peniel UMC
Holy Ghost Headquarters Revival Center at The Met
Iglesia del Barrio
International Assembly of God
Morris Brown AME
Mt. Sinai Church of God In Christ
Mt. Zion Baptist Church
New Comfort Baptist Church
New Covenant Church of Philadelphia
New Hope Temple Baptist
Nineteenth Street Baptist Church
North Penn Baptist
Pathway Evangelistic Church
Proclamation Presbyterian Church*
Salvation Army Tabernacle Corps
Sayers Memorial United Methodist
Shiloh Baptist Church
Southwest Seventh Day Adventist
Spirit & Truth Fellowship
St. Phillips Baptist
Tasker Street Baptist Church
Tenth Memorial Baptist
Union Baptist Church
Victory Outreach Church
Wayland Memorial Baptist Church
Wayland Temple Baptist
Yesha Ministries
Zion Baptist Church
Zoar United Methodist

* These churches are located in the Philadelphia suburbs and became involved in the mentoring project through their pre-existing relationships with Philadelphia congregations or other connections to Amachi leadership.

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